

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 SINGAP 00224 01 OF 02 161217Z
ACTION HA-05

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INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SINGAPORE 0224

BANGKOK FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY DERIAN

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM, SN
SUBJECT: ASSISTANT SECRETARY DERIAN'S CONVERSATION WITH LEE KUAN
YEW ON HUMAN RIGHTS

REF: SINGAPORE 0198

SUMMARY: DURING A JANUARY 12 MEETING WITH PM LEE, ASSISTANT
SECRETARY DERIAN QUESTIONED HIM AS TO WHY HE COULD NOT TAKE A
LESS RESTRICTIVE ATTITUDE ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN LIGHT OF HIS
STRENGTH AND ABILITY AND OF SINGAPORE'S ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
PROGRESS. PM LEE RESPONDED THAT A CONCERN FOR THE WELL-BEING
OF HIS PEOPLE, WHICH BEGAN WITH THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION,
WAS WHAT LED HIM INTO POLITICS. HE THEN REVIEWED THE ROLE THE
MALAYAN COMMUNIST PARTY HAS PLAYED IN SINGAPORE AND MALAYSIA,
UNDERLINING THE TERRORISM EMPLOYED THE COMMUNISTS TO INTIMIDATE
PEOPLE, WHEN QUESTIONED ON A AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL REPORT ON
SINGAPORE, LEE SPOKE SCATHINGLY OF AI SECRETARY-GENERAL MARTIN
ENNALS. HE NOTED THAT THE AI POSITION THAT PRISONERS OF
CONSCIENCE SHOULD BE RELEASED MADE AN EXCEPTION IN THE CASE OF
THOSE ADVOCATING THE USE OF FORCE TO OVERTHROW GOVERNMENTS.
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PAGE 02 SINGAP 00224 01 OF 02 161217Z

WHEN DERIAN ASKED WHY DETAINEES COULD NOT BE TRIED, THE PM
REPLIED THAT FEAR OF RETALIATION ON THE PART OF WITNESSES
MADE IT EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN A CONVICTION. IN RESPONSE
TO AN INQUIRY ABOUT THE USE OF NUMBERED BALLOTS, LEE NOTED
THAT, FIRST, THE SYSTEM WAS INHERITED FROM THE BRITISH,
AND, SECOND, IT PROTECTED HIM AGAINST OPPOSITION CHARGES OF
STUFFING THE BALLOT BOXES. DERIAN ASKED SPECIFICALLY ABOUT THE

DETENTION OF SHAMSUDDIN TUNG, WHOM THE PM DESCRIBED AS A "MERCENARY" ATTEMPTING TO PIT CHINESE AGAINST MALAYS AND VICE VERSA. LEE EXPLAINED THAT ONE OF HIS OWN MAJOR OBJECTIVES HERE WAS TO DRAW PEOPLE AWAY FROM THEIR COMMUNAL BACKGROUNDS. END SUMMARY.

1. FOLLOWING ASSISTANT SECRETARY DERIAN'S CONVERSATION WITH PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW ON THE QUESTION OF A TRANSIT CAMP FOR INDOCHINA BOAT REFUGEES (REFTEL, THE DISCUSSION TURNED TO THE SUBJECT OF HUMAN RIGHTS. FOLLOWING ARE HIGHLIGHTS OF THIS DISCUSSION.

2. DERIAN REMARKED THAT PRIME MINISTER LEE WAS A STRONG AND ABLE MAN, AND NOTED SINGAPORE'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN SOCIAL PROGRESS AND ECONOMIC GROWTH UNDER HIS LEADERSHIP. WHY, THEN, COULD NOT PM LEE TAKE A LESS RESTRICTIVE ATTITUDE REGARDING HUMAN RIGHTS? SHE INDICATED THE NEED OF PEOPLE EVERYWHERE FOR PROTECTION AGAINST THE MIGHT OF THE STATE, AND EXPRESSED CONCERN FOR THOSE ELEMENTS WITHIN SINGAPORE, WHO, ALTHOUGH IN THE MINORITY, FELT THE NEED FOR SUCH PROTECTION.

3. PM LEE SAID THAT "TO SAVE TIME" HE WANTED TO EXPLAIN HIS PERSONAL PHILOSOPHY. HE WAS VERY MUCH CONCERNED WITH THE WELL-BEING OF HIS PEOPLE; OTHERWISE HE COULD NOT BE IN HIS PRESENT BUSINESS. HIS CONCERN DATED BACK TO THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION, WHEN HE HIMSELF HAD BEEN SENSITIZED TO POLITICS BY JAPANESE BRUTALITY. HE RECALLED HAVING BEEN BEATEN UP BY JAPANESE TROOPS
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 SINGAP 00224 01 OF 02 161217Z

AND HAVING NARROWLY MISSED EXECUTION. AFTER THE WAR, HE SAID, HE FACED A CHOICE: WHETHER TO BECOME PERSONNALLY COMMITTED OR TO GO ON ACCEPTING THE STATUS QUO. HE HAD CONCLUDED THAT HE COULD NOT LOOK AT HIMSELF IN THE MIRROR UNLESS HE BECAME INVOLVED; AT THAT POINT IN TIME AGAINST THE BRITISH WHO HAD ABANDONED THE PEOPLE OF THIS REGION TO THE JAPANESE AND HAD THUS FORFEITED THEIR CLAIM TO LEADERSHIP.

4. PM LEE RECALLED THAT THE MALAYAN COMMUNIST PARTY HAD BEEN FOUNDED AT ABOUT THE TIME OF HIS OWN BIRTH, AND BY WORLD WAR II WAS THE ONLY FORCE IN THE REGION WILLING TO STAND UP AGAINST THE JAPANESE. THE BRITISH HAD ARMED THE COMMUNISTS WHO EMERGED FROM WORLD WAR II A STRONG, DEDICATED FORCE AND WHO STILL REMAINED VERY MUCH IN BEING AS AN ELEMENT TO CONTENT WITH. THE COMMUNISTS HERE, PERHAPS UNLIKE THEIR COUNTERPARTS IN EUROPE, WERE TOUGH AND WOULD NOT GIVE UP THEIR STRUGGLE TO ACHIEVE VICTORY. ALTHOUGH THERE WERE PROBABLY NO MORE THAN 50 HARD-CORE COMMUNIST LEADERS THROUGHOUT MALAYSIAN AND SINGAPORE, THEY WERE DEDICATED, RUTHLESS MEN. PM LEE MENTIONED THAT TWO LEADERS WITH WHOM HE HAD WORKED IN THE POLITICAL STRUGGLE AGAINST THE BRITISH IN THE 50'S REMAINED IN PRISON AT THEIR OWN VOLITION; THEY KNEW THAT ALL THEY HAD TO DO TO GET OUT OF JAIL WAS TO SIGN A

DECLARATION THAT THEY NO LONGER SUPPORTED THE USE OF FORCE BY THE COMMUNISTS TO OVERTHROW THE EXISTING GOVERNMENT, BUT THEY REFUSED TO DO SO IN HOPES THAT WHEN THE DAY OF EVENTUAL COMMUNIST VICTORY ARRIVED THEY WOULD BE ON THE REVIEWING STAND TO WATCH THE VICTORY PARADE.

5. PM LEE CONTRASTED THE OVERT USE OF BRUTALITY BY THE JAPANESE WITH THE MORE INSIDIOUS TYPE OF TERRORISM EMPLOYED BY THE COMMUNISTS TO INTIMIDATE PEOPLE. BACK IN 1965, WHEN HE AND HIS SUPPORTERS WERE HOLDING A TEA TO CELEBRATE HIS FIRST ELECTION VICTORY, A SHOT RANG OUT IN THE HOUSE NEXT DOOR -- THE COMMUNISTS HAD ASSASSINATED A YOUNG MAN WHO HAD INFORMED AGAINST THEM TO THE BRITISH AUTHORITIES. THIS KIND OF LESSON HAD NOT BEEN LOST ON THE PEOPLE, WHO UNDERSTOOD THAT THEY RISKED THEIR OWN LIVES
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 SINGAP 00224 01 OF 02 161217Z

AND THE LIVES OF THEIR FAMILIES IF THEY STOOD UP AGAINST THE COMMUNISTS. PM LEE MAINTAINED THAT HE WAS RISKING HIS OWN LIFE IN TAKING A HARD POSITION AGAINST COMMUNISM, BUT HE WAS WILLING TO DO SO FOR THE SAKE OF THE SINGAPORE PEOPLE.

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PAGE 01 SINGAP 00224 02 OF 02 161250Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 SINGAPORE 0224

5. DERIAN MENTIONED THE AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL REPORT ON SINGAPORE AND PM LEE SAID HE REGARDED THE AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL SECRETARY-GENERAL MARTIN ENNALS AS A FRAUD. THE AI POSITION THAT PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE SHOULD BE RELEASED MADE

AN EXCEPTION IN THE CASE OF THOSE ADVOCATING THE USE OF FORCE TO OVERTHROW GOVERNMENTS, AS HE, LEE, HAD MADE PLAIN TO ENNALS IN A CAMBRIDGE DEBATE IN 1969. LEE MENTIONED THAT HE BELIEVED SINGAPORE'S RECORD IN THIS REGARD WAS GOOD --SINGAPORE HAD IN FACT VOTED IN FAVOR OF THE UNGA PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH A UN COMMISSIONER ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND HAD WELCOMED VISITS BY AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL.

7. DERIAN ASKED PM LEE WHY THOSE DETAINED IN SINGAPORE COULD NOT BE BROUGHT TO TRIAL. PM LEE REPLIED THAT IT WOULD BE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO SECURE A CONVICTION IN VIEW OF FEAR ON THE PART OF WITNESSES THAT THEY OR THEIR FAMILIES WOULD SUFFER RETALIATION IF THEY TESTIFIED. IT WAS A TRADITION IN THIS PART OF THE WORLD NOT TO BECOME INVOLVED, AND TO STAY OUT OF TROUBLE. THERE WAS FEAR OF THE COMMUNISTS, AND ALSO OF THE SECRET SOCIETIES, AGAINST WHICH HE, LEE, HAD ALSO STRUGGLED.

8. DERIAN ASKED PM LEE ABOUT THE USE OF NUMBERED BALLOTS IN SINGAPORE'S GENERAL ELECTIONS. PM LEE SAID THAT THIS WAS A SYSTEM CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 SINGAP 00224 02 OF 02 161250Z

INHERITED FROM THE BRITISH, AND "IF IT'S ALL RIGHT WITH THE BRITISH IT'S ALL RIGHT WITH US." IN ADDITION, SINGAPORE DID NOT HAVE VOTING MACHINES SUCH AS THOSE IN THE U.S., AND THE USE OF NUMBERED BALLOTS PROTECTED HIM AGAINST OPPOSITION CHARGES THAT HE AND HIS PARTY HAD WON BY STUFFING BALLOT BOXES.

9. DERIAN ASKED ABOUT THE DETENTION OF SHAMSUDDIN TUNG. PM CALLED TUNG A "MERCENARY," WHO WROTE ARTICLES FOR PAY ATTEMPTING TO STIR UP CHINESE CHAUVINISM AND PIT CHINESE AGAINST MALAYS AND MALAYS AGAINST CHINESE. SHAMSUDDIN TUNG HAD BEEN INVOLVED IN THIS TYPE OF ACTIVITY IN THE EARLY 70'S, WHEN UNDER THE DIRECTION OF LEE EU SENG AND LEE MOH SENG HE HAD WRITTEN ARTICLES IN A SINGAPORE CHINESE NEWSPAPER EXTOLLING LIFE ON THE CHINA MAINLAND AND SAYING HOW SUPERIOR IT WAS TO CONDITIONS HERE. TUNG HAD BEEN RELEASED AFTER SAYING HE WOULD BEHAVE HIMSELF, BUT HAD BECOME ACTIVE AGAIN JUST BEFORE THE LAST ELECTIONS WHEN HE HAD PREACHED THE SUPERIORITY OF CHINESE CULTURE, AND ARGUED THAT PEOPLE OF CHINESE DESCENT IN SINGAPORE SHOULD EDUCATE THEIR CHILDREN IN CHINESE.

10. PM LEE EXPLAINED THAT ONE OF HIS PURPOSES HERE WAS TO DRAW THE PEOPLE AWAY FROM THEIR COMMUNAL BACKGROUNDS; CHINESE, INDIAN, AND MALAY AS THE CASE MAY BE; BY ADVOCATING THE USE OF ENGLISH. THIS PURPOSE HAD SUCCEEDED TO SOME EXTENT, AND THE RACE RIOTS WHICH HAD CHARACTERIZED THE SINGAPORE SCENE IN THE 50'S AND 60'S NO LONGER WERE TAKING PLACE.

11. DERIAN WONDERED WHETHER IF IT HAD NOT BEEN FOR THE INTERRUPTION OF THE BRITISH RULE BY THE JAPANESE IN WORLD WAR

II, PM LEE MIGHT HAVE GONE THROUGH LIFE ACCEPTING THE STATUS
QUO AND LIVING PEACEFULLY UNDER BRITISH CONTROL. PM LEE
SPECULATED THAT HE MIGHT HAVE DONE SO, AND OBSERVED THAT THERE
WERE THOSE (HE STARTED TO SAY LIKE "MY", PROBABLY
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PAGE 03 SINGAP 00224 02 OF 02 161250Z

MEANING HIS FATHER) WHO EVEN NOW REMAIN PASSIVE AND TOOK NO
PART IN POLITICS.

12. THE MEETING CONCLUDED AFTER ALMOST TWO HOURS WITH PM LEE
INDICATING THAT HE HAD ANOTHER APPOINTMENT. AS A FINAL WORD,
HE DECLARED THAT HE BELIEVED THAT THE BEST POLICY WAS FOR HIM
TO LAY HIS CARDS ON THE TABLE, AND NOT DISSEMBLE IN ANY WAY
ABOUT HIS BELIEFS. DERIAN SAID SHE APPRECIATED PM LEE'S FRANKNESS.
HOLDRIDGE

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